

Message Text

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ACTION OES-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 ACDA-05 CIAE-00 INR-07 IO-11

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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2610

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 1292

PARIS PASS NASA EUROPEAN REPRESENTATIVE

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: TSPA OCLR GR

SUBJECT: CLEARANCE REQUEST FOR NASA LEAR JET (PROJECT PORCUPINE)

REF: A. STATE 31098; B. ATHENS 10981

C. STATE 21328

1. IN OUR MESSAGE OF FEBRUARY FOURTH (REF B), WE POINTED OUT THAT THE SUBJECT PROJECT COULD HAVE POSSIBILITIES FOR MISUNDERSTANDING HERE IN GREECE AS WELL AS POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GOG. SINCE REFTEL (A) MAKES NO REFERENCE TO THIS MESSAGE, AND PARTICULARLY SINCE DATES OF PROJECT ARE APPARENTLY BEING MOVED FORWARD, EMBASSY WOULD LIKE TO UNDERSCORE THE FACT THAT ROUTINE CLEARANCE OF SUBJECT PROJECT BY GOG SHOULD NOT REPEAT NOT BE ASSUMED BY NASA TO BE A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

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2. THE STATUS OF US MILITARY OPERATIONS IN GREECE

AT ELLINIKON AIRBASE AND OTHER INSTALLATIONS IS CURRENTLY UNSETTLED AND IS THE SUBJECT OF SENSITIVE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOG, OF WHICH THE CURRENT ROUND BEGAN JAN 26 AND IS STILL UNDER WAY. THE ATMOSPHERE IN PARLIAMENT, PUBLIC OPINION, AND PRESS TO FOREIGN--ESPECIALLY AMERICAN--MILITARY PRESENCE IN GREECE IS SUFFICIENTLY SENSITIVE THAT GOG RECENTLY FELT IT HAD TO DENY EVEN ROUTINE US SHIP VISITS IN ATHENS AREA THIS MONTH (SEE SEPTTEL TO FOLLOW). AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, IT IS CLEAR THAT IN CONSIDERING THE PROPOSED SCIENTIFIC PROJECT, THE IMMEDIATELY RESPONSIBLE FOREIGN OFFICE DIRECTORATE WOULD NEED TO CHECK WITH THE GREEK SIDE IN THE BASE NEGOTIATIONS, AS WELL AS WITH THE DEFENSE MINISTRY AND OTHER PARTS OF THE GOG.

3. IT IS OUR JUDGEMENT THAT INTRODUCING THIS PROPOSAL TO THE GOG DURING THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS WOULD ONLY COMPLICATE AN ALREADY EXTREMELY COMPLEX SITUATION, AND PROBABLY BE EXPLOITED BY THE LOCAL SENSATION-SEEKING PRESS, BE MADE A SOURCE OF EMBARRASMENT FOR THE GOG, AND PROBABLY BE DETRIMENTAL TO USG INTERESTS IN ELLINIKON AND OTHER IMPORTANT INSTALLATIONS HERE.

4. EMBASSY THEREFORE PROPOSES TO DEFER DIRECT APPROACH TO GOG UNTIL AFTER THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS ARE COMPLETED, WHICH WE EXPECT WILL BE BY THE END OF THIS WEEK. WE WOULD EXPLAIN THE PROJECT TO APPROPRIATE FOREIGN OFFICE OFFICIALS AND LEAVE A PAPER INCORPORATING THE DETAILS OF THE PROJECT AS PRESENTED IN REF (C). HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF WHAT WILL BE PERCEIVED HERE AS POLITICAL/MILITARY IMPLICATIONS OF THIS PROJECT, WE WOULD NOT REPEAT NOT ANTICIPATE AN EARLY GOG RESPONSE TO OUR CLEARANCE REQUEST, AND OUR CURRENT FEELING IS THAT THE GOG MAY WELL BE RELUCTANT TO APPROVE IT AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE CONDITIONS DESCRIBED ABOVE. IN LIGHT OF WHAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS AN UNCERTAIN SITUATION, NASA MIGHT WISH TO CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE SITES OR DATES FOR THE PROPOSED PROJECT IN THE EVENT THAT GOG DOES NOT GRANT CLEARANCE.

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